The Ship of Theseus

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Purpose

This activity is a walking journey built around the metaphor of a ship. Each of us represents a part of a ship: a plank, a rope, a sail, an anchor, a steering wheel, and so on. During the journey, we are confronted with choices, encounters, and obstacles. With each decision, something about our ship changes. In this way, we build both literally and figuratively on our journey and on ourselves.

The route is not fixed. The group determines the course together, makes choices at junctions, and carries out small reflective tasks along the way. Cooperation is essential: you do not make decisions only for yourself, but as part of the ship. By actively helping to shape the path, you experience co-creation, self-determination, and group dynamics.

The concept is also inspired by the Johari Window, a psychological model that distinguishes four areas of awareness: the open area, the blind spot, the hidden area, and the unknown area. Through shared experiences, self-reflection, and group interaction, participants are given the opportunity to make aspects of themselves visible, to share them, or to discover them. In this way, the journey functions as an experiential application of this model, in which personal growth and interpersonal feedback arise naturally.

You set out as one ship; along the way, you change plank by plank; when you arrive, you are still the same ship, yet also a different one.

Step-by-Step Plan

	Step:	**Instructions:**
1.	**Preparation:**	**Location:** Choose a natural environment (park, forest, field) with 3 to 5 possible decision points (junctions, bridges, turns, and so on). Note these on a small map or provide hints. **Tasks:** Prepare 5 to 7 empathy-based tasks (see examples). **Materials:** A small map with decision points, cards with ship roles (plank, rope, anchor, and so on), writing materials, or a large sheet for the visual ship.

2	**Check-in:**	**Explain the metaphor:** We are a ship together. Each of us is one part of it: a plank, a rope, a mast, a compass... During our journey, that ship changes. What does that mean for us as a group and as individuals? **Choosing a role:** Ask everyone to choose a role that fits how they feel or what they want to practise. **Examples of ship roles:** - Rope: I connect - Sail: I accelerate, catch the wind - Steering wheel: I give direction - Anchor: I slow things down, bring calm - Plank: I support, help carry - Compass: I sense direction - Mast: I signal Let everyone say their choice aloud or write it on a card. **Make agreements:** - There is no fixed leader - Everything happens through consultation - You may remain silent, but you are still invited to take part
3	**Exercise:**	The group sets out together as Ship A. Along the way, the ship transforms. At each junction or decision point (approximately every 10 minutes), the group chooses a direction together. The facilitator gives options, or the group chooses entirely for itself. **Along the way, carry out empathy-based tasks, such as:** - Walk for 10 minutes as if you are a person who is often misunderstood. How does your posture, pace, or interaction change? Reflect together. - Imagine that someone unfairly places a label on you (“difficult”, “slow”, “stupid”, and so on). Walk for 10 minutes with that in mind. How does this influence your behaviour or your connection with the group? - Solve a small challenge together, for example a riddle or a shared task. Pay attention to how cooperation takes place. Who decides? Who is heard? For example: together, look for 10 objects in nature of a particular colour (for example red). Agree together on how you will approach this: who takes the lead, who observes, who decides? - Ask reflection questions, for example: What would you like people truly to understand about making choices in your life? And who do you think has a right to be involved in that?

		At the end of the walk, you arrive as Ship B.
4	**Debriefing:**	**Invite everyone to reflect on the role they chose at the beginning:** - Am I still that role? - What has changed? - Where did I fulfil my function in the ship? **Have everyone visualise this on a large sheet:** - Attach or draw their "new" role. - Show how the ship as a whole has changed. **Reflection questions (including reference to the Johari Window):** - What have you learned about yourself? (open area) - What did you discover through the feedback or reactions of others? (blind spot) - What did you share that you had first kept hidden? (hidden area) - Did anything surprising emerge in yourself? (unknown area)
5	**Closing:**	Invite everyone (who wishes) to share one sentence: "I began as a [role] and I end as a [role], because..."

Timeline

Preparations	5 – 15 minutes
Check-in	5 – 10 minutes
Exercise	60 – 90 minutes
Debriefing	30 – 60 minutes
Closing	5 – 10 minutes

Requirements

Materials:

What?:	**Quantity:**
Scheme or map with decision points (to be developed by yourself, depending on the environment)	1
Small tasks, such as riddles or reflection questions	5-7
Role cards, and a large white sheet for visualisation	1 set

People / Facilitators:

At least 1 trained facilitator (care professional, coach, or educational staff member). This may be supplemented by an expert by experience or a therapist for further depth or follow-up care.

Location:

A quiet walking route where there is space for conversation and tasks, not in a busy city or next to a motorway, where you cannot hear one another or where there are many people around.

Evaluation

For facilitators:

Debrief with the team: Where did the group take ownership? Where did cooperation get stuck, or where did it flow naturally? How can we translate this into our own practice?